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ABSTRACT

Children of the Baby Boom generation have set off a population explosion in U.S. schools. This dramatic enrollment growth, known as the Baby Boom echo, began in the nation's elementary schools in 1984, and elementary enrollment has increased annually since then. At the secondary level, enrollment increases began in 1991 and are expected to continue through the year 2007. Combined public and private high school enrollment is expected to reach 16.4 million by 2007, a 13 percent increase from 1997, and total enrollment is expected to reach 54.4 million by 2006. While the Baby Boom echo is the primary reason for this increase, other key reasons include: a higher birth rate among Hispanics and other minorities, increases in immigration, especially in point-of-entry cities, more children enrolled in prekindergarten and kindergarten, and a larger share of students remaining in school to get their diplomas. There is a distinct regional pattern to effects of the Baby Boom echo, with increases in western states, and declines in the Northeast and most of the Midwest. Rapid and uneven growth, which places burdens on state and local education agencies, will be characteristic of future enrollment changes. The number of classroom teachers is expected to increase from 3.1 million in fall 1997 to 3.3 million in fall 2007, and expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools are expected to increase 22 percent from 1996-97 to 2006-07. A table lists the 10 public school districts with the largest enrollment increases, and a second table shows enrollment in kindergarten through grade 12 by region and state through 2007. (SLD)

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ISSUE BRIEF

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The Impact of the Baby Boom Echo on U.S. Public School Enrollments

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The children of the Baby Boom generation have set off a population explosion in the nation's public schools. This dramatic enrollment growth, known as the Baby Boom echo, began in the nation's *elementary* schools in 1984, and elementary enrollment has increased annually since then. At the *secondary* level, annual enrollment increases began in 1991 and are expected to continue through the year 2007. Combined public and private high school enrollment is expected to reach 16.4 million by the year 2007, a 13 percent increase from 1997.

National Enrollment Trends

After reaching a peak of 51.3 million students in the fall of 1971, *total* enrollment in elementary and secondary public and private schools in the United States declined annually through the 1984–85 school year. The current enrollment upturn began in fall 1985 and is expected to continue through the year 2006. Total enrollment in elementary and secondary public and private schools is projected to reach 52.2 million in the 1997 school year, the highest in U.S. history.

By the year 2006, total enrollment is expected to swell to 54.4 million (enrollment in the year 2007 is projected to decline slightly, to 54.3 million). However, enrollment growth in the next 10 years is not projected to be as fast as the 1987–97 rate. Whereas high school enrollment is expected to increase steadily from fall 1997 to fall 2007, elementary enrollment over that time period is expected to rise slightly and then return to 1997 levels.

The primary reason for the timing and rate of the enrollment increase is the rising number of annual births since 1977, which is referred to as the Baby Boom echo. Other key reasons include: a higher birth rate among Hispanics and other minorities; increases in immigration, particularly in point-of-entry cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Miami; a greater number of children enrolled in pre-K and kindergarten; and a larger share of young people remaining in high school to receive their diplomas. Since 1984, these factors have combined to produce large enrollment increases in some of the fastest-growing areas of the country. For example, table 1 shows individual school districts that experienced the greatest increases in enrollment from 1984 to 1994.

Impact on Regions, States, and Districts

The increases in U.S. enrollment are not spread equally across all areas of the country, and there is a distinct regional pattern to the effects of the Baby Boom echo. From 1997 to 2007, enrollments are expected to increase in all but one Western state and in most states in the South, but enrollments are expected to decrease in five of nine Northeastern states and in 10 of 12 Midwest states (table 2). In all, enrollments are expected to hold steady or increase in 30 states and decline in 20 states and the District of Columbia.

Over the next decade, student enrollment is expected to increase by 16 percent in California, making it the fastest-growing state. States that will experience a decline in overall student population include the District of Columbia (by 7 percent), Wisconsin (by 7 percent), Iowa (by 7 percent) and Maine (by 8 percent).

Within states, the rate and timing of the enrollment changes also differ across school districts. In Nevada, overall enrollment is expected to grow by about 15 percent from 1996 to 2001. However, the number of students in Nevada's Clark County School District is projected to increase by about 28 percent from 1996–97 to 2000–01 (179,000 students to 223,000 students). This kind of rapid and uneven growth places additional burdens on state and local education agencies.

How Will the Schools Keep Up?

The number of classroom teachers is expected to increase from 3.1 million in fall 1997 to 3.3 million by the fall of 2007. Overall, total yearly current expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools are projected to increase 22 percent from 1996–97 to 2006–07, from $257 billion to $314 billion (1994–95 dollars).

Table 1.—Ten public districts with the largest enrollment increases: Fall 1984 to fall 1994

District	State	Enrollment 1984	Enrollment 1994	Enrollment increase 1984–94	Percent change 1984–94
New York City	NY	923,100	1,022,534	99,434	10.8
Dade County School District	FL	231,277	321,615	90,338	39.1
Los Angeles Unified	CA	546,990	632,973	85,983	15.7
Broward County School District	FL	127,474	199,255	71,781	56.3
Clark County School District	NV	89,627	156,348	66,721	74.4
Palm Beach County School District	FL	78,374	127,519	49,145	62.7
Orange County School District	FL	78,624	118,666	40,042	50.9
Gwinnett County School District	GA	41,096	80,220	39,124	95.2
Montgomery County Public Schools	MD	88,811	117,082	28,271	31.8
Mesa Unified School District	AZ	41,746	69,160	27,414	65.7

NOTE: Some changes may be affected by school district boundary changes.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data surveys; and *Projections of Education Statistics to 2006.*

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Table 2.—Enrollment in grades K–12 in public and private elementary and secondary schools, by region and state: Fall 1987, 1997, 2002, and 2007 (in thousands)

Region and state	1987	Projected			Percent change		
		1997	2002	2007	1987 to 1997	1997 to 2007	1987 to 2007
Total enrollment	45,488	52,217	53,962	54,324	14.8	4.0	19.4
Private	5,479	5,863	6,061	6,061	7.0	3.4	10.6
Public	40,008	46,353	47,911	48,262	15.9	4.1	20.6
Northeast	7,252	8,150	8,283	8,143	12.4	-0.1	12.3
Connecticut	465	537	531	511	15.5	-4.8	9.9
Maine	212	214	203	197	0.9	-7.9	-7.1
Massachusetts	825	947	987	974	14.8	2.9	18.1
New Hampshire	166	201	203	199	21.1	-1.0	19.9
New Jersey	1,093	1,248	1,290	1,280	14.2	2.6	17.1
New York	2,594	2,902	2,985	2,965	11.9	2.2	14.3
Pennsylvania	1,669	1,838	1,817	1,754	10.1	-4.6	5.1
Rhode Island	135	156	159	158	15.6	1.3	17.0
Vermont	93	108	108	106	16.1	-1.9	14.0
Midwest	9,870	10,643	10,588	10,397	7.8	-2.3	5.3
Illinois	1,811	1,988	2,022	2,010	9.8	1.1	11.0
Indiana	964	989	1,020	1,023	2.6	3.4	6.1
Iowa	481	501	480	467	4.2	-6.8	-2.9
Kansas	421	476	473	470	13.1	-1.3	11.6
Michigan	1,569	1,655	1,637	1,596	4.2	-3.6	0.4
Minnesota	721	847	827	798	17.5	-5.8	10.7
Missouri	802	902	906	893	12.5	-1.0	11.3
Nebraska	268	290	288	286	8.2	-1.4	6.7
North Dakota	119	117	113	111	-1.7	-5.1	-6.7
Ohio	1,793	1,840	1,817	1,772	2.6	-3.7	-1.2
South Dakota	127	147	143	140	15.7	-4.8	10.2
Wisconsin	772	890	864	831	15.3	-6.6	7.6
South	14,419	16,650	17,393	17,543	15.5	5.4	21.7
Alabama	729	748	779	789	2.6	5.5	8.2
Arkansas	437	458	464	458	4.8	0.0	4.8
Delaware	96	114	121	120	18.8	5.3	25.0
District of Columbia	86	82	78	76	-4.7	-7.3	-11.6
Florida	1,665	2,300	2,396	2,372	38.1	3.1	42.5
Georgia	1,111	1,358	1,471	1,502	22.2	10.6	35.2
Kentucky	643	661	660	648	2.8	-2.0	0.8
Louisiana	793	810	791	783	2.1	-3.3	-1.3
Maryland	684	840	868	867	22.8	3.2	26.8
Mississippi	506	512	525	527	1.2	2.9	4.2
North Carolina	1,086	1,240	1,341	1,332	14.2	7.4	22.7
Oklahoma	584	621	603	593	6.3	-4.5	1.5
South Carolina	615	665	688	694	8.1	4.4	12.8
Tennessee	824	923	978	984	12.0	6.6	19.4
Texas	3,237	3,900	4,156	4,314	20.5	10.6	33.3
Virginia	979	1,115	1,182	1,198	13.9	7.4	22.4
West Virginia	344	302	291	285	-12.2	-5.6	-17.2
West	8,468	10,910	11,646	12,179	28.8	11.6	43.8
Alaska	106	133	138	145	25.5	9.0	36.8
Arizona	572	832	914	922	45.5	10.8	61.2
California	4,489	5,860	6,337	6,780	30.5	15.7	51.0
Colorado	560	684	722	727	22.1	6.3	29.8
Hawaii	166	204	214	228	22.9	11.8	37.3
Idaho	212	255	275	283	20.3	11.0	33.5
Montana	152	169	167	165	11.2	-2.4	8.6
Nevada	168	295	330	321	75.6	8.8	91.1
New Mexico	287	352	372	393	22.6	11.6	36.9
Oregon	456	544	550	549	19.3	0.9	20.4
Utah	423	488	519	543	15.4	11.3	28.4
Washington	776	993	1,009	1,019	28.0	2.6	31.3
Wyoming	98	100	100	105	2.0	5.0	7.1

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data surveys, and *Projections of Education Statistics to 2007*.

This issue brief was prepared by John Bare, Education Statistics Services Institute, under the direction of Tom Snyder, National Center for Education Statistics, Data Development and Longitudinal Studies Group. For more information regarding this brief, please contact Tom Snyder at (202) 219-1689. To order additional copies of this Issue Brief or other NCES publications, call 1-800-424-1616. It may also be found on the Internet at http://www.ed.gov/NCES/pubs.

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